

For I am persuaded, that neither death nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.
Romans 8

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The Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood (CBMW), in cahoots with the Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission of the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC), has released “The Nashville Statement”, the latest big antigay manifesto. The Southern Baptists published their first antigay declaration, along with their protest against Atlanta Mayor **Maynard Jackson’s** proclamation of Gay Pride Day, back in June 1976 – a year following the founding of Evangelicals Concerned.

Drafted at the Gaylord Opryland Resort, (You can’t make this stuff up!), The Nashville Statement was published online on August 29, 2017.

Nashville’s Mayor **Megan Barry** objected to The Nashville Statement’s identification with her city, where discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity is illegal. She was in the early days of mourning over her 22-year-old son’s death from an opioid overdose, four weeks before. Yet, she stepped up to defend others who, while not facing the same challenges her son had faced, must still cope with tougher lives than necessary, given the antigay Christians’ persistent faultfinding over involuntary same-sex orientation and committed same-sex marriages in the lives of their neighbors, members of their own families and fellow church members.

In spite of immediate and well-informed evangelical criticism against The Nashville Statement, the CBMW has scheduled a Nashville Statement follow-up event for 2018 in Louisville, Kentucky, to continue its fight against all who find themselves differently oriented sexually.

The Nashville Statement is a *religiously* framed assault that overloads others with a burden that The Statement’s heterosexual authors and signatories don’t, and wouldn’t, load onto themselves. Thus, The Nashville Statement blatantly disregards The Golden Rule. Jesus rebuked such Pharisees, calling them “hypocrites” and “whited sepulchers” for their self-righteously loading unbearable religious demands onto others while they refused to lift even a finger to *help*, much less, *identify with*, or *empathize* and offer any *realistic* support to those they self-righteously oppress. (Matt 23:27; Luke 11:46)

The Nashville Statement also *seriously* fails to take the whole Bible *seriously*. It blatantly disregards the *historical contexts* and the *incarnational reality* of the Bible.

Evangelical Bible scholar **Peter Enns** calls attention to this in his “Lansdale Statement”, his ingenious parody rebuttal to The Nashville Statement’s outlined “Articles of Affirmation and Denial”. In his own Article 1, Enns asserts: “WE AFFIRM that God, having given us minds, rejoices when we use them. WE DENY that God intended Scripture to relieve us of this responsibility.” In Enns’ Article 2, he states: “WE AFFIRM that Scripture, by God’s wisdom, was written by actual people in actual historical contexts for actual contextual reasons, and that such contexts are central to proper biblical understanding and application. WE DENY that Scripture, which reflects the wisdom of the Creator, is simply sitting there waiting to be used irrespective of its various contexts.” Enns helpfully continues through seven more spoofs against the erroneous assumptions and the unwarranted applications in The Nashville Statement.

Moreover, as the late **Kenneth E. Bailey**, a research professor of New Testament, explained in his, *Jesus Through Middle Eastern Eyes: Cultural Studies in the Gospels*, published by evangelical InterVarsity Press in 2008: “All interpretations of Scripture need to be *tentatively* final. They have to be final in the sense that obedience cannot wait for the disciple to read yet one more technical article in biblical studies. At the same time, all efforts in biblical interpretation are flawed. Our interpretation of Scripture, therefore, must never be closed to correction and revision.”

And when it comes to turning *biblical texts into systematic theology*, here’s the wisdom of the noted Oxford and Cambridge evangelical theologian and molecular biophysicist, **Alister McGrath**: “Theology is just another discipline, not an eternal theological truth. It is natural and to be expected, that it will be

revised over and over again by each generation.” The late systematic theologian, **Clark H. Pinnock**, a *Christianity Today* award-winning author, wisely and humbly expressed this same idea when he wrote: “Feeling our way toward the truth is the nature of theological work even with the help of Scripture, tradition, and the community. We are fallible and historically situated creatures, and our best thinking falls far short of the ideal of what our subject matter requires. A pilgrimage, therefore, far from being unusual or slightly dishonorable, is what we would expect theologians who are properly aware of their limitations to experience.”

Recently, **Mark Galli**, the editor of *Christianity Today*, “a magazine of evangelical conviction”, as he reminds us, addressed the current dispute over identification as “evangelical”. As Galli reports: “The evangelical faith is going through another of its spasms of critical self-reflection. Every week, it seems another prominent person claims that “evangelicalism is in crisis” or that they no longer want to be identified with the word *evangelical*.”

Well, historically, of course, the word, “evangelical”, comes from the New Testament Greek word, *eu-angelion*, best translated as, “good news”, i.e., the Good News of the Gospel of God’s free grace in Christ. So, there’s no good reason to rename us. Actually, whenever the ignorant media misuse the word, that’s another opportunity to *share* the Gospel for what it really is. This controversy can be a gift, used with all the savvy of a serpent, as Jesus called us to do in this old world of ravaging wolves. (Matt 10:16)

This Evangel, the Gospel, is the Good News – the *very best* news the world has ever received. But one can’t find *this* in The Nashville Statement. It doesn’t merely *relegate* this Good News of God’s amazing grace in the sacrificial atonement of the Christ of the cross, but, in its *rant* against gay people, in effect, it *erases* this Good News. What an *utterly superficial* sense of *sin* and *salvation* props up the notion that a lovingly same-sex marriage can *tip the scales to hell* while a selfish effort to put God in one’s debt by living alone to atone, can *tip the scales to heaven!* Our sin *was so serious* and it *is so serious*, that it cost the incarnate Lord his life. His sacrifice is already *quite sufficient* and *is not enhanced* and *can’t be enhanced*, by something so inadequate as our switching from a same-sex marriage of committed love and support, in sickness and health, to leaving this person in the lurch and living life on our own.

At EC’s first summer conference in 1980, where gay non-Christians were just starting to check into evangelical faith, Blair referenced Ecclesiastes 4: “Two are better off than one, because together they can work more effectively. If one falls down, the other can help him up. But if someone is alone and falls, it’s too bad, because there’s no one to help. If it’s cold, two can sleep together and stay warm, but how can one keep warm by oneself? Two can resist an attack that would defeat one alone.”

Sadly, neither those biblical words of wisdom nor the amazing, law-free Gospel of God’s grace in Christ Jesus, is what the The Nashville Statement has to offer gay folks.

And, *beyond* the Evangel, in matters of evangelical *details*, here’s how the eminent evangelical historian **Mark Noll** puts it. He says: “Once past a shared commitment to a supernatural gospel, evangelicals are all over the place theologically.” An Orthodox Presbyterian, **D. G. Hart**, and a Southern Baptist, **Al Mohler**, wrote jointly, in 1996: “No single evangelical tradition exists.” This truth is illustrated today in the fact that Mohler *signed* The Nashville Statement and Hart *did not*. Hart dismisses The Nashville Statement by saying that there’s “a lot of signaling going on” there.

And, over the course of one’s own *personal* history of thought, evangelical scholars, like all inquisitive thinkers, do change their minds over time. If they don’t, they’re probably in some bull-headed denial. **Paul Woolley**, the church history professor at Westminster Seminary’s founding under **J. Gresham Machen**, so often frankly admitted that, he *resisted* writing books because he just *knew*, from his own experience, that he’d later not agree with all that he’d written earlier. On issues of homosexuality, there are many evangelicals who’ve changed their minds, and more change their minds every day. And their changed minds are in the direction of informed scriptural insight and loving support for gay men and lesbians.

Unfortunately, *institutionalized* interpretation of the Bible *does* tend to get *closed* to correction and revision, for, to revise it in light of new, even persuasive, data, is often irrationally experienced as *threatening to everything* – including, importantly, *financial* security. But, eventually, even institutional intransigence transitions to greater truth, though not before it’s done more damage.

Of course, even the best insights of the best biblical scholars and theologians must then be translated to seminarians who'll be preaching to parishioners who'll filter what they hear and understand, or not, given *their* formative years and current agendas within the bonds of *their* cultural prejudices, mores and personal experience or the lack of it, all of it, *personally interpreted* as they *can* and as they *will*.

As generations have come and gone, so many *interpretations* of what was *said*, “the Bible *says*” on this or that, have *had* to be *revised*. This historical fact should give all Christians pause when tempted to squat in place and kneejerk old dogmatic declarations in defense of ourselves whenever we've been blindsided with challenges to assumptions or “traditions” that now, truly do call for careful, reasonable, reexamination of what we've assumed we knew for sure, all along. In this 500th year of **Martin Luther**'s Bible-based *rediscovery* of the Gospel and his consequent, vigorous protest that sought to *revise* what, for many centuries, had been assumed – even by the *younger* Luther – to be the teachings of Jesus and his first disciples, what more *historically significant* reminder do we need?

We really don't need to *wait* for what Bailey called, “yet one more technical article in biblical studies”, to clarify where Christians have gone wrong on homosexuality. The *biblical* and *historical* and *theological* studies *already* have demonstrated that there's *nothing* in the *historical* or *cultural* context of the *biblical* eras, and therefore, *nothing* in the *awareness*, *expectations* or *intensions* of biblical writers and their *contemporary* listeners and readers, that, in any way, corresponds to today's psychological understanding of, and insight into, *homosexual orientation* and its naturally consequent *behavior* in today's *egalitarian* marriages of *two men* or *two women*.

Younger evangelicals *today* are surprised to learn what many leading *mid-20th* century evangelical biblical scholars and theologians were *already* saying in support of the now increasingly clearer understanding and affirmation of homosexuals. Many in today's *antigay* crowd hadn't even been born during those more tolerant years.

Back then, **Bernard Ramm**, evangelical Baptist biblical scholar, warned: “The issues about homosexuality are very complex and are not understood by most members of the Christian Church.” He expressed his concern over the fact that, to them, it's simply, “a vile form of sexual perversion” that they *assume* is condemned in the Bible.

Back then, **Marten Woudstra**, Calvin Seminary's Old Testament professor – and the *most conservative* professor on the Calvin campus at that time – pointed out that there is “*nothing* in the Hebrew Bible that corresponded to homosexuality as we understand it today.” He was the Old Testament consultant to the Christian Reformed denomination's study of homosexuality. He was *so conservative* that he didn't presume to speak with like authority on the New Testament, as it wasn't his area of expertise. But he did argue *for* the CRC's position on a *literally, historical* Adam. Woudstra also chaired the Old Testament translation committee for the NIV Bible, evangelicals' favorite 20th-century version of the Bible. Woudstra served as the president of the Evangelical Theological Society (1979). He was a longtime subscriber to EC's publications and an EC friend.

The other 20th-century Bible that was popular with evangelicals was, *The Good News Bible*, now called *Today's English Version*. It was the paraphrase of **Robert Bratcher**, a Southern Baptist biblical scholar. It, like the NIV, was published by Zondervan. And Bratcher, too, was supportive of gay Christians and was a longtime subscriber to EC's publications.

On the New Testament, Southern Methodist biblical scholar **Victor Paul Furnish** said bluntly what shouldn't have needed to be said at all, but, of course, given the recklessness of those who project into the Bible what's not there, it needed to be said: “There is no text on homosexual orientation in the Bible.”

Back in 1964, in his book, *The Ethics of Sex*, the great German evangelical theologian, **Helmut Thielicke**, unequivocally stated that, for biblical Christians today, homosexuality “can be discussed at all only in the framework of that freedom which is given to us by the insight that even the New Testament does not provide us with an evident, normative dictum with regard to this question. Even the kind of question which we have arrived at”, he explained, “must for purely historical reasons be alien to the New Testament”.

Sarah Ruden, a scholar of ancient Greek language and culture, explains that, in New Testament times, let alone in the Old Testament era, “There were no gay households; there were in fact no gay institutions or gay culture at all.” She affirms this in her *Books & Culture* interview for *Christianity Today*, for which

she's a frequent contributor. She concludes that, Paul "could have had no idea of anything in homosexuality that was not exploitative and cruel." She cites a Roman poet's describing being "cut to pieces [as] the ordinary term for 'to be the passive partner'." This does not describe a loving gay couple today. Besides, not all gay men engage in such stereotyped "active" and "passive" roles, and some heterosexual couples do. Of course, same-sex or not, what a loving couple is all about is not *penetration*, but the profoundest psychosexual and physical *intimacy*. The pair is about *persons*, not *body parts*. And what that ancient Roman poet was describing was, unmistakably, *raw power exerted over another man*.

Contrary to today's antigay cocksureness that hopelessly *projects* "homosexuals" into two words that Paul used – one of which, he apparently coined – even **Jerry Falwell's** old Rightwing *Fundamentalist Journal* admitted: "These words are difficult to translate". New Testament scholar **Gordon D. Fee** of the evangelical Regent College notes that one of these words, *malakos*, "soft", is not typically used about sex. (I Cor 6:9; I Tim 1:10)

Catherine Clark Kroeger of the evangelical Gordon-Conwell Seminary, writing in *The Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*, detected *self-castrating fertility cult prostitutes* in Paul's reference to the intrinsic penalties attached to certain sex acts he alluded to in Romans 1:26ff. There were, indeed, such cross-dressing temple prostitutes in pagan fertility cults throughout the Mediterranean world of Paul's missionary journeys.

Also, socially powerful pagan men regularly abused pre-pubertal boys for sexual pleasure, though they stopped doing so when these young lads entered into puberty.

But there was no *mutually voluntary* sexual relationship between two male adults of equal social standing. In that ancient culture, for any man to *use*, in an explicitly *sexual* way, another man of his *same* social status would have been *social abuse by rape*, i.e., totally dishonoring and horribly humiliating the *other man*. In such a scenario, the one man would be *dominating* the other into the *inferior* position of a mere piece of *property*, e.g., what *he owned* as *his* livestock, *his* slaves, *his* wives and *his* concubines. Other instances of such power-driven abuse are found, e.g., in the attempted rapes by the men of Sodom to dominate the suspicious foreigners at Lot's house. The common sexual abuse of prisoners of war is yet another such example of power politics.

Historically speaking, same-sex *marriage* is something *very new*. And, of course, so is today's psychological *understanding* of same-sex *orientation*.

What else so many of The Nashville Statement's authors and signatories show not the least awareness of, is the fact that, among 20th-century evangelicals, many held accepting views of homosexuality. These included professors at leading evangelical seminaries and colleges and were veteran members and leaders in evangelical professional organizations such as the Evangelical Theological Society, the Christian Association for Psychological Studies, the American Scientific Affiliation, et al. They presented pro-gay papers at the annual meetings of these associations and were received with interest and nothing like the hostility that began to be expressed later on, under the influence of the Religious Right. They keynoted EC retreats in the last quarter of the 20th-century and the first decades of the 21st.

The Nashville Statement also fails to heed the *wisdom* of Jesus' commission when he told disciples: "I am sending you out as sheep among wolves. So, be shrewd as serpents and harmless as doves." (Matt 10:16) This Good News we're called to share is *the power of God for salvation* and yet, the cross of Christ has always been, still is, and always will be, in this *fallen* world, an *offense*, *nonsense*, to "the perishing". (Rom 1:16; I Cor 1:18)

Historically, Christians have so seldom been able to manage this twofold assignment of our calling – to be both *wise* and *harmless*. We so easily, so often, wind up as *rattled snakes* and *nitpicking pigeons*, without the necessary balance of savvy gentleness. *CT's* Mark Galli is no pro-gay activist, but he finds problematic, The Nashville Statement's nitpicking at *celibate* homosexual Christians who claim a "homosexual self-conception".

So, The Nashville Statement repeats the common failure of Christians through the ages. It presents to non-Christians, such a *caricature* of Christ's Good News, that it's easy for them to see right through the Christians' hypocrisy and hate, and so, to deem themselves more *loving* and thus, *less* in need of salvation, than these supposedly "saved" Christians. Then, non-Christians dig themselves into a deeper rationalized resistance to the real Good News of Christ. Instead of emphasizing the *essence* of the *biblical*

Evangel and waiting for God's Spirit to convict those who don't know God's deep love in Christ, same-sex-obsessed authors and signers of The Nashville Statement distract attention to *condemning* folks the churches have long oppressed and haven't learned to love enough to even try to understand any more *accurately* and *empathically*, let alone *evangelically*. The Nashville Statement is then, in effect, a Pharisaical and self-serving *stumbling block* to the Gospel's true message of God's love. Where's any faithfulness to Christ's call in all that?

The Nashville Statement's 159 initial signatories are, mostly, the usual religious antigay activists, e.g., **Al Mohler, James Dobson, Tony Perkins, John Piper, R. C. Sproul, John MacArthur, Richard Land, Marvin Olaskey, Eric Metaxas**, et al. Some signers seem to be signing such a document for the first time. Still, and *significantly*, some really major evangelical leaders who are not actively pro-LGBT and who've signed similar antigay documents in years past, e.g. "The Manhattan Declaration" in 2009, are conspicuously *missing* from this list of initial signatories. These missing evangelical leaders include, e.g., **Tim Keller, Franklin Graham, Timothy George, Ravi Zacharias, Bill Hybels, Chuck Swindoll, and Jerry Falwell, Jr.** – to name just some of them.

On Keller's not signing The Nashville Statement, Rightwing radio host **Erick Erickson** agitates himself with fears that too many young pastors in his and Keller's conservative Presbyterian Church in America (PCA) have what he dubs, "Tim Kelleritis", i.e., they'd "prefer to spend all their time on [what Erickson sneers at, as] love", instead of meddling in their neighbors' loving, faithfully committed and perfectly legal same-sex marriage.

Yet, didn't Jesus tell his followers *to treat others as we wish to be treated?* (Luke 6:31) That's, by far, the very most practical, experiential and reliable model for knowing how to treat others: Treat *them*, as *you* want to be treated. And, didn't Jesus go even further? He said: "I say to you who are willing to listen, *love your enemies!* *Do good, to those who hate you. Bless those who curse you.*" (Luke 6:27ff)

Don't the signatories of The Nashville Statement consider LGBT activists to be *their enemies*? They're always complaining that *gay* people *hate* them. So, show some *love!* They gripe that same-sex marriage imposes burdens on *their religious rights*. So, where's the *love* for these that they accuse of *imposing* on them? Where are Christians' *good deeds* for LGBT folks? Was their *gift* to gay men and lesbians the now defunct "ex-gay" catastrophe, or voting against employment rights for gay men and lesbians, or campaigning against marriage for same-sex couples, or their quack diagnosis of AIDS as God's curse on *gays*?

Of course, antigay religionists, including The Nashville Statement's authors, signers and defenders, *rationalize* that what *others* call Christians' *mean-spirited* attacks on gay folks *is* actually "loving". They say they *mean well* and they're doing it for the *eternal welfare* of those who, otherwise, *as homosexuals*, are headed for *hell*. Mohler says that to *fail to condemn homosexuality* would be to *fail to love homosexuals*. But, if they *really do* want to reach out to homosexuals who've been so cruelly singled out, for so long, by angry antigay preachers as *especially* sinful, how is it that they can't come up with a more workably winsome and welcome, less needlessly loaded, way to proclaim the Good News of God's free and amazing grace? How can they believe that this *antigay manifesto is evangelism?* By rationalizing.

One signatory, **Joel Belz**, founder of the Religious Right's antigay *World* magazine and a member of the PCA, admits, with reference to the relatively small number of original signatories: "for an issue said by some Christian leaders to be the dominant cultural question of our lifetimes, 159 people is a pretty paltry initial showing". He's right.

Belz graduated from the PCA's Covenant College in 1962, while **Robert G. Rayburn** was Covenant's president. Rayburn was *founding* president of *both* Covenant College *and* Covenant Seminary. Rayburn was also the very *first* evangelical leader to support Ralph Blair's plan to found Evangelicals Concerned for evangelical affirming of same-sex attracted evangelicals and their same-sex partnerships. He'd known Rayburn since 1959 when Blair helped to found, and was the first to preach for, South Chapel in Youngstown, Ohio. It's now Cornerstone Church of the PCA. For that building's dedication, Blair designed colonial wall tablets for the chancel, painted oil portraits of Calvin, Edwards, Warfield and Machen for the pastor's study and painted biblical scenes for the Sunday School rooms. Rayburn preached the dedicatory Sunday sermon and Blair led in the dedicatory prayer.

Rayburn was one of several major evangelicals among the charter subscribers to Blair's *Homosexual Counseling Journal* in the early 1970s. And, along with another professor from Covenant Seminary, Rayburn attended the 1975 Kansas City edition of Blair's nationwide *H CJ* series of seminars for members of the helping professions, "Counseling and Homosexuality".

Later that year, in conversation about Blair's plan for Evangelicals Concerned, Rayburn suggested that it be *publicly* launched during the upcoming 1976 National Association of Evangelicals convention in Washington, DC. And, that's what was done – to the dismay of NAE officials who, at that same convention, featured **Guy Charles** and his baseless "ex-gay" claims. Three months later, Blair debated Charles on **Barry Farber's** Show in New York. Soon after that, Charles was publicly exposed as sexually involved with young men coming to him for his "ex-gay" experience at Truro Church, a conservative Charismatic Episcopal church in Virginia. He was then let go and moved to Chicago as a gay activist.

In 1979, Blair toured Israel, the Middle East and Paul's sites in Turkey with Rayburn and other Covenant and PCA folks. At EC's 2015 summer conference, Rayburn's help with EC was remembered in the centennial year of his birth. His nephew, **Jim Rayburn III**, son of Young Life founder **Jim Rayburn**, keynoted EC's summer conference in 2014.

As Belz grants: "There's a lot that goes on behind the scenes". Indeed, there is! For instance, there are always *economic* implications to signing *any* controversial public proclamation. But, for evangelicals, *economic* motivation would seem to *favor signing* The Nashville Statement's *antigay* agenda to secure one's good reputation and one's livelihood for "in house" evangelical employment. So, The Nashville Statement's "paltry initial showing" of signatories, of which Belz speaks, may speak volumes on a continuing evangelical evolution in both biblical and psychological understanding and even empathy on these issues. And, as some people already have suggested, The Nashville Statement does seem to be a "last gasp" effort.

Pew Research now finds that support for same-sex marriage among white American evangelicals born since 1964 jumped from 29 percent in 2016 to 47 percent in 2017 – a *huge leap* in just *one year*. The percentage of support among *older* white evangelicals has increased, too, but by only 1 percent over that same period. Obviously, support is increasing faster among the *younger* evangelicals.

Pew finds that, in terms of typology groups, "Core Conservatives" divide, 49 percent opposing same-sex marriage and 43 percent in favor. Among "Devout & Diverse", the figures are 47 percent oppose, 46 percent favor. And, since 2015, same-sex marriage support among all African-Americans has jumped from 39 percent to 51 percent.

By contrast, virtually all self-identified "liberals" support same-sex marriage. But, that is a "no brainer" for liberals. For liberals, to *oppose* same-sex marriage would be a big liability, politically, socially and economically. For now, the opposite is the case for conservatives and evangelicals. Yet, as the trends among conservatives and evangelicals continue to show increased support for same-sex marriage, political, social and economic stigma, the cost, attached to such support, will diminish. This trending panics the authors and signers of The Nashville Statement as well as their supporters. In fact, such panic may have pushed the authors to produce The Nashville Statement at this time.

Some of what else is "behind the scenes" of The Nashville Statement includes the fact that, one of the signatories, **Darrell Bock** of Dallas Theological Seminary and a past president of the Evangelical Theological Society (2001) has reasonably cautioned with Christian compassion: "There may be no greater mess for the church than the question of how to engage with the LGBT community." And, critics of The Nashville Statement see it, itself, as *adding* to that mess by *adding up* to merely more hurtful, counterproductive engagement with the LGBT community. And, although he's a signatory, the British evangelical writer, **Alastair Roberts**, laments the fact that, what's *missing* from The Nashville Statement is a "strong word against the vicious animus against LGBT persons that has far too often infected Christian contexts, rendering an orthodox stance on sexual holiness odious to those who cannot separate it from the personal hatred that they have experienced from Christians on account of their sexuality."

The "behind the scenes" history includes the fact that another Nashville Statement signatory, evangelical theologian **H. Wayne House**, a past president of the Evangelical Theological Society (1991), wrote in his 1988 book, *Civilization in Crisis*, co-authored with **Richard Fowler** of the Minirth Meier Clinic in Dallas, that EC's founder, is "possibly the most articulate theologian of the homosexual movement". Ob-

viously, though, EC's founder is not articulate enough to dissuade this particular evangelical theologian from signing The Nashville Statement.

And, back in 1964, Blair apparently was not articulate enough to dissuade two Yale students, who've now signed the Nashville Statement – **Douglas Stuart** and **John Frame** – since, professors, at Gordon-Conwell and Reformed Seminary, respectively. They'd attended a lecture that Blair gave at Yale while on IVCF staff at Penn. During his talk, he voiced support for same-sex couples, as he'd done while in USC's graduate school and in IVCF there – without any pushback from other IVCF students or the USC faculty advisor, later a dean at Fuller. But, after his talk at Yale, word got back to the IVCF headquarters and Blair was told he'd not be *reappointed* to IVCF staff for the *following* school year. Yet, that IVCF reaction, over half a century ago, was far more lenient than today's IVCF policy, whereby, any failure to fully affirm IVCF's new 20-page antigay policy, even if one keeps his or her reservations quiet, results in a 2-week notice of “involuntary termination”.

IVCF's currently rigid position against homosexuality is also at odds with the spirit and views of the late **Stephen A. Hayner**, the national president of IVCF from 1988 to 2001. Hayner was an Old Testament scholar as well. He wrote to EC to say: “I have indeed appreciated your work and the work of many in EC over the years. May the Lord continue to strengthen, guide and encourage you day by day.” Before he was diagnosed with terminal cancer, he replied to EC's invitation to keynote EC's June 2012 conference: “One of these years this is going to work out, but unfortunately I already have an engagement for that weekend. I'm sorry. I continue to follow the work of EC with great interest and appreciate the newsletters. Joyfully, Steve”. He died in January 2015.

One Nashville Statement signer, after reading an EC keynote address by Blair, called it “wonderful” and he added: “Wish we could have you preach it here.”

Forty years ago, another Nashville signatory wrote to Blair, saying that he'd read his work with “interest and profit” and asked that EC material be sent to his evangelical colleagues. More recently, a signatory – surprised and in a spirit of humble gratitude – shared with Blair: “So great to learn that God is saving people in gay Christian circles. I guess I felt along with many evangelicals that once someone drops the traditional view of homosexuality, all the other dominos will fall and the result will be some kind of vacuous liberalism or secular humanism. That would seem not to be the case. I don't understand God's way of working, but what else is new?” His candid self-awareness is also this evangelical's faithful trust that God's *ways* are, yes, *mysteries* to us all.

Among The Nashville Statement's signatories are those who are *openly* more nuanced in their approach. Liberty University's **Karen Swallow Prior** favorably cites the late gay Roman Catholic priest, **Henri Nouwen**, in endorsing “hospitable orthodoxy”. For doing so, she's been attacked by less hospitable colleagues, but she can and does reach some same-sex attracted Christians with her friendlier tone. And, in the “behind the scenes” category, there's the fact that, though as a priest, Nouwen was committed to *his* celibacy, he did greet *other* gay folk who “came out” to him, by telling them that their same-sex attraction was “a gift” and then he'd introduce them to some *gay Christian couples*.

One day, evangelicals, in humbling transition, will see the need to apologize for past judgmental self-righteousness regarding *homosexuality* and *same-sex marriage*, just as most of today's evangelicals have repented or are starting to repent for former their generations' use of Bible verses to oppose *interracial marriage* and *racial integration*. Yet, even here, as some do continue to express such apologies, they get pushback from fellow church members who make excuses for even their rather recent forebears.

Founded in the segregated South of 1927, Bob Jones University refused to enroll any *black* students until 1971, and then, *only* if they were *already married*. But BJU finally dropped its rule against *interracial* dating in 2000 and, in 2008, formally apologized for decades of *anti-black* policies, admitting that the school's old rules on racial matters had been “shaped by culture instead of the Bible. We failed to accurately represent the Lord and to fulfill the commandment to love others as ourselves. For these failures we are profoundly sorry.”

In 2014, **Steve Pettit** became BJU's president, the first president from outside the Jones family. He reiterated: “The Bible is clear. We are made of one blood.” (Acts 17:26) That, of course, was already in the Bible during all the decades of BJU's racist chapel rants against interracial marriage. Now, Pettit has

signed The Nashville Statement. The rotating routine of culture shaped Bible interpretation continues, this time, against yet another segment of the human race, created in God's image, but rejected by custom.

Across America, LGBT students and alumni have formed support groups connected to their evangelical colleges and seminaries. These include students and/or alumni of Bob Jones University, Gordon College, Fuller Seminary, Wheaton College, Westmont College, Biola University, Eastern University, Eastern Mennonite and Goshen College, Calvin College, Pepperdine University, Messiah College, Samford University, Hope College, Western Seminary, Baylor University and many other Christian schools.

Still, along with the younger evangelicals' increasing understanding and, therefore, growing acceptance, of persons of same-sex orientation, misinformation and therefore misunderstanding of homosexuality continues within even the *younger* generation of Fundamentalist-trained Bible *literalists*. For example, a Moody Bible Institute graduate student, **Grayson Gilbert**, blogs against same-sex oriented couples' marriages while he says he's happily meeting his own needs for sexual intimacy "in the balmy Midwest with his beautiful wife". He sees The Nashville Statement as, "a line in the sand worth drawing" for, he complains, rather unclearly, with "gospel-saturated application of nearly everything, some have neglected to have a gospel-saturated gospel". But, his is still the *antigay* theme that amounts to the *replacing* of the *law free* gospel with a counter-gospel of legalism and works-righteousness.

With gays in mind, Gilbert insists: "God does not love any person on this planet just as they are." Never mind that Gilbert, here, forgets that old invitation hymn, "Just as I am", so familiar at Billy Graham Crusades. He fails to reckon with all the *past tense sense* of the Good News of Romans 5:8ff: "God demonstrates His love to us in that, *while we were yet sinners*, Christ *died* for us. *While we were* God's enemies, *we were reconciled* to Him through His Son." And, what about Jesus' rebuttal of the Pharisees' objections to his eating and fellowshiping with those they so self-righteously *labeled*, "sinners"? In Jesus' response, didn't he identify himself with The Good Shepard who, for the sake of *his one still lost* little lamb, went to such exhausting lengths to find and rescue this *precious* one and about which there was then such great joy over its having been found? (Luke 15:1ff) What *but* God's *prevenient* grace and love for the *lost* is represented here? As Paul declared, God *chose* us *in love*, *before the creation of the world*. (Eph 1:4)

Rowland Croucher, Australian psychologist, a Fuller Seminary alum and evangelical supporter of same-sex marriage, notes on his Facebook page: "With Jesus, acceptance precedes repentance; with Pharisees – ancient and modern – it's the other way around." Said Luther long ago: "God does not love us because of our worth; we're of worth because God loves us."

Here's more of the "behind the scenes" history of The Nashville Statement. Over the years – even on Religious Right letterhead – evangelicals sought Blair's professional advice on the effectiveness of *secular* theories and therapies for reorientation of homosexuals when their own propagandized "ex-gay" efforts were not working. Of course, they weren't *publically* admitting that their "ex-gay" efforts weren't working. More than one of these evangelical inquirers, including a popular evangelical celebrity, told Blair that they were "intrigued" by claims that men had *overcome* homosexuality by learning to turn from their, "contempt for the world", through the rigidly cultic Aesthetic Realism of poet **Eli Siegel**. This shows how very *desperate* the "ex-gay" propagandists were, while they were marketing their false promises of "healing" through the "ex-gay" or "conversion" experience. In Blair's own clinical practice, he'd counseled the *still gay*, *non-Christian ex-members* of that Aesthetic Realism cult who were now trying to learn how to live responsibly and rationally with the sexual orientation they'd innocently found in themselves.

Blair informed the evangelical inquirers that *none* of these so-called "therapeutic" interventions *changes* anyone's sexual *orientation*. Blair's reply was rooted in his extensive doctoral and post-doctoral research on the etiology and treatment approaches, e.g., efforts of psychoanalysis, psychodynamic psychotherapy and psychiatry, chemotherapy and hormonal therapy, behavioral therapy, client-centered therapy, RET, Gestalt, etc., as well as the efforts by "spiritual", so-called "nouthetic", "miracle healing", casting out of "gay demons", "ex-gay" Pentecostal groups or the alleged "reparative therapy" of Christian counseling. *Nothing* proved to be either *etiologically significant* to same-sex attraction or at all *effective* in *changing* homosexual *orientation*.

No matter all the many defensively false claims to the contrary, all alleged “successful” treatment outcomes were based merely on “reparative” therapists’ or “ex-gay” counselors’ *self-reports*. Such self-serving claims, no matter how many, are of course, shoddy science, mere sham, whether secular or spiritual. And no publicized claims of such sexual *reorientation* were verified by *objective* measurements, for example, by conducting penile plethysmography or phallometric testing over time – before and after treatment. In fact, “ex-gay” advocates and so-called “reparative” therapists defiantly and repeatedly *refused* to put their claims to such objective tests. They rationalized their refusals by saying that, to have such testing done, would be encouraging sexual *temptation* and *sin*. But if these now, “former” homosexuals, were shown homoerotic stimuli, how would *this* be, for *them, now, sexually tempting?* *Heterosexual* men aren’t sexually tempted by *male* eroticism; *gay* men aren’t sexually tempted by *female* eroticism. But penile volume measurements would prove that the “ex-gay” were still *gay*.

At a convention of the Christian Association For Psychological Studies, held in Atlanta in 1982, Blair challenged psychiatrist **E. Mansell Pattison** for his claiming that gay men (they were *not* Pattison’s patients) were changing through the EXIT “ex-gay” program at Melodyland. Pattison tried to minimize the continuing homosexual fantasies that these “ex-gays” admitted, and, to which, Blair reminded him. Pattison wisecracked in anger: “Who doesn’t have homosexual fantasies?” To the audience of psychologists, counselors and psychiatrists, this was a stunning retort, so he quickly tried to recover by adding: “... especially after a fight with his wife.” It didn’t work. He then admitted that, he’d “not be surprised if some of those” 11 “ex-gays” he and his wife were introduced to, of EXIT’s *most successful* cases would “return to *homosexual lifestyles*”. But, even as he and I debated there in Atlanta, the *two founders* of that “ex-gay” program were *exiting* EXIT to enter a committed *gay relationship with each other*. Eight years later, in 1990, this gay Christian couple, **Mike Bussee** and **Gary Cooper**, keynoted EC’s western summer retreat.

Unlike the honesty of Bussee and Cooper in facing reality and apologizing for what they’d earlier endorsed, and then going on to live together in loving support of each other, even through a terminal illness, far too many “ex-gay” aftermaths are filled with *misery*. Suffering from moral stress and sexual injury at the hands of spiritual leaders who shamed them *into* “treatment” and shamed them *after* the “treatment” failed, many killed themselves. Many who survived all the disillusion and betrayal, left their churches and the “faith” of those who’d preached to them a false “gospel” and burdened them with demands for “deliverance” based in baseless premises and promises. But, the only sexual orientation they’d ever experienced and ever would experience, was still labeled “sin”.

In 1981, “Homosexuals CAN Change” was the false promise defensively bannered across the cover of *Christianity Today*. This was done in spite of all of that day’s “ex-gay” scandals, including *sexual* abuse at the hands of “ex-gay” leaders, and in spite of all of the clinical evidence to the contrary.

Two years later, in 1983, *CT*’s editor, **Kenneth Kantzer**, admitted, albeit understatedly: “The evidence is clear that such a turn [from homosexuality to heterosexuality] is often not very successful.” Only “*often ...*”? Only “... not *very* successful”? *It never was successful!* But that’s *not* what most evangelical leaders wanted to hear. So, such claims for healing continued to be promoted in evangelical media and evangelical churches – for *too many* more decades, and at the expense of *too many* more, gay Christian lives.

Now, long overdue, 36 years *after* that *CT* cover headline, “Homosexuals CAN Change”, and just as we’re digesting The Nashville Statement, the October 2017 issue of *Christianity Today* carries the testimony of an evangelical lesbian. Its title: “I Never Became Straight”. Its subtitle: “God hasn’t removed my attraction to women. Perhaps that wasn’t his goal in the first place.” Perhaps?

This woman explains: “Slowly, I came to understand that ‘making me straight’ wasn’t the answer. There is no biblical command to be heterosexual”. *Her* statement here, however, is hardly the *thrust* of The Nashville Statement. But now, a decade into her marriage to a man, she’s still sexually attracted to women. She says she doesn’t insist that a *mixed-orientation* marriage is “correct” for *other* same-sex attracted persons. Yet, evangelical preachers and counselors still push *same-sex* attracted persons into *mixed-orientation* marriages.

The tragedies left in the wake of fake assurances of “cures” include the broken homes of *mixed-orientation* marriages that, typically, *gay men* and *heterosexual women*, got pushed into. These sad con-

sequences for such *mismatched* couples and their kids could have been prevented by honestly facing facts that were ecclesiastically and politically inconvenient – even forbidden any mention – by those who pushed these very predictably unworkable marriages while enjoying, for themselves, their own appropriately matched marriages of mutual free choice.

Three decades after Kantzer's reluctant admission of "ex-gay" failures, the Exodus "ex-gay" network closed down in 2013. It closed down with deep apologies and regrets for all the *harm* that was done for so long. Yet now, a few leftover pushers of escape from homosexuality continue to hold out, even while covering up the *very latest* "fall" of a last-minute cancelled cohort's appearance. **John Paulk**, the *former* "ex-gay" leader of The Nashville Statement signer James Dobson's Focus on the Family "ex-gay" program, has been denouncing "ex-gay" claims for years now. This "ex-gay" leader who, with his "ex-lesbian" wife appeared on a *Newsweek* cover, has repeated for years that he *never did change*. He's now the *ex-husband* of the current "ex-lesbian" leader of the leftovers.

Joining with her in a leftover "ex-gay" campaign is yet another signer of The Nashville Statement, **Robert Gagnon**. He teaches Bible at a mainline Presbyterian seminary. He claimed in his antigay book, in 2001, that what he called, "the complementarity of male and female sex organs [is] the most unambiguous" argument against homosexuality.

But isn't sexual *complementarity* a bit more *complicated* than tinker toys? What about lips and arms and the brain – the most significant sex organ of them all?

Whether homosexual or heterosexual, it never comes down to *just anyone else's penis* or *just anyone else's vagina*. It's *always* about a *person* – this very special *person* – and in the case of the same-sex oriented, this *fascinatingly other* person will be a *particular* person of the *same* sex, while, for the heterosexually oriented, this *fascinatingly other* person will be a *particular* person of the *other* sex. It's *really* not just *any penis* or *any vagina* to which anyone is sexually or romantically attracted to. Such a superficial reduction to *sex organs* may, indeed, be the *focus* of a rape, but not the *focus* of romance.

Moreover, any marriage counselor who has counseled both heterosexual couples and same-sex couples over time knows that *all* couples have to deal with the *same* sorts of *challenges*, e.g., living together with another whose *personality* is not *one's own*, for the sort of individual one is involuntarily attracted to is not a carbon copy of oneself. One's had enough of oneself. But, so often, one hears the remark: "What does [he or she] see in [her or him]?" Well, the questioner doesn't *see it* for the questioner sees only some sort of *stereotyped* personality differences. The persons *involved* with each other *see* through *their eyes* and *imprinted brains* to the *idiosyncratic gestalt* of *their private experiences*.

All couples must deal with everyday matters of finance, health concerns, their in-laws and children (in heterosexual or, yes, in same-sex families). Some have to deal even with problems of depression, anxiety, sexual neglect or abuse, additions, etc. It can be rough. But it can be even much rougher if the couple – especially the Christian couple – is also up against the antagonism of homophobic church leaders and those the leaders influence.

So far as coping with challenges for all couples, *teamwork* is necessary and requires both *will* and *skill* on each person's part, as well as genuinely shared *basic values* of each, including commitment to the partnership. Indeed, no matter the sexual orientation of the couple, the challenges are all really quite the same – *except* for the *irrationally* fabricated *mixed-orientation* marriages ludicrously pushed by antigay preachers and counselors. Yet, it's in that *specific* set up – and it *is* a "set up" – prescribed, but doomed to fail from the outset, that Gagnon finds his "most unambiguous" argument against gay marriage.

On the surface, The Nashville Statement *may seem not* to be pushing the old "ex-gay" and, "reparative", hoaxes. But, on closer inspection, it *is* pushing the same *guilt tripping doubletalk* that was so common all along. And The Nashville Statement does this in the very same weasel words way. It alludes to, "a follower of Jesus [being enabled] to put to death sinful desires", i.e., be rid of the only involuntary sexual orientation and sexual intimacy needs that this same-sex attracted person ever has known and ever will know. It's the same old verbal chicanery that ensnared the desperate and even destroyed them.

Evangelical psychologist **Warren Throckmorton** of Grove City College once defended "reparative therapy" and the "ex-gay" movement, even in a *secular* journal, *Professional Psychology: Research and Practice*, June 2002. In *EC's Review*, Vol. 28, No. 1, Blair wrote a critical assessment of that article. Throckmorton has since changed his mind. He now rightly laments, too, that The Nashville Statement

declares “same-sex attraction to be sinful even if never acted upon”. He recognizes, that The Statement’s saying that, same-sex attraction can be “ ‘put to death’ [still] sounds like the authors expect same-sex attracted people to be able to kill their attractions by religious means”. Yes, that is The Nashville Statement’s message! Throckmorton asserts that, “Based on nearly 20 years of research and clinical experience with GLB people, I believe the Statement offers false hope based on wishful thinking.” He adds: “There is no reason to sugarcoat this. It is a denial of reality to do so.” Given his professional disappointment with the impotence of “reparative” efforts, he correctly explains: “The Nashville Statement affirms a view of sexual orientation and change that has been discredited and encourages pastors to mislead their same-sex attracted congregants. Along with other problems, this is reason enough to reject The Nashville Statement.”

A number of evangelical leaders have publicly stated that they *refused* to sign The Nashville Statement – not because they necessarily *support* same-sex marriage – but because of what they consider to be The Statement’s nasty tone, its overreaching and its quite predictable, if unintended, negative consequences.

Critics have called The Nashville Statement, “hateful”. But typical retaliation to such accusations of “hate” is shown in one blogger’s venting back: “There’s nothing hateful about holding to biblical truths.” His simplistic stand for his opinion on “biblical truths” misses crucial points. The big questions are: What *are* the “biblical truths” about today’s controversy over same-sex orientation and same-sex marriage? And, what *were* the “biblical truths” when these Southern Baptist signers’ forebears appealed to “biblical truths” to endorse *racial segregation* and condemn *interracial marriage*, not to mention their “biblical truths” that rationalized the Old South’s *slavery*. Even their *identity* as Southern Baptists, as Southern Presbyterians, and as Southern Methodists is rooted in that *earlier racism* when they split from their Northern Christian brothers and sisters. Even *after* the Civil War – they concocted “biblical truths” with which they tried, for many years, to mollify their mourning after defeat. But, then and now, the *clear* biblical truth and application of The Golden Rule was, still is, and will always be, by contrast, beyond dispute: Treat *others*, as you want to be treated! Treat *others’ needs*, as you want *yours* to be treated! Treat *others’ marriages*, as you want *your own marriage* to be treated. That rules out slavery and segregation and forbidding marriage to *same-sex* couples.

Denny Burk heads The Nashville Statement’s co-sponsor, the CBMW. He admits that “the most push-back” that The Statement gets is against its Article 10. Article 10 insists that it’s “sinful to approve of homosexual immorality”. That’s the Statement’s *phrasing* for *any* and *all* homosexuality. It’s piously claim that such approval “constitutes an essential departure from Christian faithfulness and witness”.

Article 10 also *denies* that it is at all possible for “otherwise faithful Christians to agree to disagree” on *homosexuality*. In other words, The Statement’s *antigay* dogma is *the* “red line” that all “faithful Christians”, as defined by The Nashville Statement’s self-appointed authors, *dare not, must not* cross. Unlike the wiggle room of the old “ex-gay” claims, there’s absolutely no wiggle room in this demand. This is not a matter for discussion. This is about *power*.

But, of course, even among these Nashville *signers*, there’s full freedom to *agree to disagree* vigorously over all sorts of deeply, historically rooted, theological variations, including, e.g., the very foundations of Reformed theology, the very basics of Dispensational theology, the fundamentals of Baptist idiosyncrasy, etc. They *already do share* evangelical fellowship with signers who’d be *absolutely forbidden* ordination in *their* different denominations. But *agreeing to disagree* with other evangelicals over what continues to keep them *separated* into historically and theologically different, even *diametrically* different, separatist, and competing denominations, all comes to a *very loud screeching halt* when a same-sex oriented person’s sexual intimacy needs come up for discussion. At that point, there’s *nothing to discuss*, nothing to *agree to disagree* about.

No wonder Article 10 is proving to be the most problematic.

A writer for the chic *New York Magazine*, who was formerly with The Progressive Policy Institute, piles onto the case against The Nashville Statement with his own faulting of Article 10. However, *he* complains that the Statement is, “trying to read [the LGBTQ-supportive Unitarian Universalists] right out of Christianity.” Doesn’t he realize that, long ago, actually from the start, the UUA *wrote itself out* of Christianity by *writing off* the most basic Christian doctrines, e.g., God’s incarnation in Christ, Christ’s resurrection, et al. Well, no, he doesn’t. Who’d ever think that any Unitarian Universalists would *want* to be

linked with evangelicals? The UUA touts its “Open Mind”, but its mind is not *that, open*. In fact, its mind is quite *proudly closed* to the Evangel.

What else today’s *New York Magazine* writers and readers, as well as today’s antigay and pro-gay activists, probably don’t realize is that, back in the early 1970s, *New York Magazine* wasn’t so gay-friendly. It refused to accept ads for what was then, New York City’s one and only *openly gay-affirming* professional counseling service. Founded by Blair, the counseling service’s Advisory Board included such LGBT pioneers as **Barbara Gittings, Martin Hoffman, Phyllis Lyon, Jeanne Manford, Merle Miller, Kate Millett, Craig Rodwell, Zelda Suplee** and others.

Whoever wasn’t around in those early days, as “gay” began to replace “homophile” as the term for what, much later, transitioned to “LGBTQQ” etc., may catch some sense of *liberal* New York’s *unease* with whatever was, in any way, “homosexual”, in 1969, the year of the “Stonewall Riots”, from the fact that, the liberal literary critic, essayist and playwright, **Eric Bentley**, on the Columbia University faculty, told *The New York Times* in 2006 (at age 90) that, in 1969, after his two failed marriages to women, “he decided to live openly as a gay man and he felt his Columbia colleagues would not have tolerated his new sexual openness.” So, he abruptly *resigned* from Columbia’s faculty. In 1969!

In his 20s, Bentley was a student at Oxford. **C. S. Lewis** was his mentor. In 1938 and 1940, Lewis wrote two long, hand-written letters of reference for Bentley, praising him as one of his two very brightest students throughout his teaching career up to that time.

In the *New York Times* piece, Bentley recalled his relating well to Lewis, as they both experienced “being looked down upon” by Oxford’s pretentious “swells” for having come from the *working class*. Bentley told the *Times* that he recalls thinking, “If C. S. Lewis has problems like that and can find a way to live with it, I can too.” And Bentley finally found a way to live with his homosexuality, too.

One evangelical who refused to sign The Nashville Statement is biblical scholar **Preston Sprinkle**. He clearly sees that the signers have “gone about this all wrong and it will tarnish the church’s already tarnished reputation with LGBT+ people”. He says it’s, “one-sided [and] fails to own up to the many – MANY – mistakes that theologically orthodox believers have made in this conversation.” He nails it in tweeting his succinct sense of the sum of the Nashville Statement: “Don’t think. Don’t nuance. Don’t discuss. And don’t listen. Just declare.”

Matthew Lee Anderson, evangelical writer and founder of the website, *Mere Orthodoxy*, agrees with Sprinkle’s assessment. He says: “Today, for the most part, dialogue is a forgotten art. Supporters of conservative religious groups and LGBT rights activists trade insults, working to rally the people already on their side rather than make new allies.” Conservative, atheist and gay philosophy professor **John Corvino**, a former Catholic, shares Anderson’s valuing of *civil discussion*. The two *agreed to disagree* in a public dialogue on homosexuality, sponsored by an evangelical church in St. Louis.

On The Nashville Statement’s obsession with *gay* sex while overlooking the many *sexual sins* of *heterosexual* Christians, Anderson says The Statement, “fails to meet a minimal, biblical standard for expressing judgment. Jesus’s demand that those who seek to correct others examine the planks in their own eye is framed in an interpersonal context, to be sure. But the same principle is given ecclesiastical form when Peter suggests that, ‘judgment begins at the house of God’.”(Matt 7:5; I Pet 4:17)

Bobby Grow, of “The Evangelical Calvinist” blog, responds similarly. He begins by asking indignantly, “What kind of church culture can produce a declaration like the Nashville Statement? Bearing witness to ourselves rather than to Jesus Christ.” He concludes: “Who do we think we are? Jesus is LORD, not the church!” A Multnomah Biblical Seminary graduate and a theological consultant to *Christianity Today*, Grow appropriately cites **Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s** critique of the American church of his day as having “never been able to understand the meaning of ‘criticism’ by the Word of God and all that signifies. Right to the last they do not understand that God’s ‘criticism’ touches every religion, the Christianity of the churches and the sanctification of Christians and that God has founded his church beyond religion and beyond ethics.”

“The Wartburg Watch 2017” quotes from someone identified as, “one of our astute readers”. On The Nashville Statement, this person says: “This is going to turn out badly. Of all the things they could rally around, why this? Statistically, the types of churches that would sign on to this probably have many more abused children and women in their congregations than people who are LGBT.”

Other Christians have been quick to speak up about the hypocrisy of several signers (even by name and circumstances) who, indeed, have been called out and disciplined for foot-dragging and even for participation in disgusting cover ups of sexual abuse against the wives and children within their congregations and their church consortiums.

Yet, of course, there really *are many* kids who *are* in these same churches who, sooner or later, must deal well with *their* unmasked-for same-sex attraction. *They're right there, already, today, inside* the churches of The Nashville Statement signers. And repeatedly, they're hearing from the pulpit, whether in blasts or by innuendo, that what they're beginning to feel and experience in themselves is *condemned by God* and they're going to *hell* for it. So, there they sit, anxious, ashamed, with no help but what they might find on the Internet – for good or ill. It's no wonder they'll likely not last inside these antigay, anti-Gospel, churches, once it's up to them alone to leave.

African-American children who grew up under the racism of segregation that used to be supported by relatives of The Nashville Statement's signers, at least knew that they were not facing the hateful world all alone, by themselves. Their parents were black, their siblings were black, their aunts and uncles and cousins were black, their neighbors were black, all of their teachers and fellow students were black and their churches were black. Still, their experience under segregation, and even later, was *oppressive*. But for a kid experiencing *same-sex* attraction within his or her own *antigay* family and *antigay* church – the lonely oppression can be *deadly*. Of course, things are changing for the better, they can be aware of more than the scary caricatures offered for many years – but that's taking place in spite of all the efforts of the authors and signers of The Nashville Statement and their religious cohorts and followers all across the country.

Eva Kendrick, the Alabama State Director of the Human Rights Campaign, America's largest LGBTQ civil rights organization, says: "I am the daughter, granddaughter, niece and relative of more than ten evangelical Baptist and Methodist ministers in Alabama and Georgia." As a lesbian, she says that her heart broke as she read The Nashville Statement and thought of "the thousands and thousands" of such kids in churches across America – with whom she can so readily identify from childhood, recalling "the communal shame and self-hate nurtured by theology at the heart of The Nashville Statement".

Many, even quite famous, leaders in evangelicalism, in the past and today, have such children, grandchildren, siblings, nephews, nieces, and other relatives who have dealt with, and will have to deal with, same-sex orientation. Their famous, *antigay* family members may be household names in Evangelicalism. Some of these sons and daughters, sisters, brothers, parents, grandchildren, nephews, nieces, et al. have managed to come to terms with their involuntary attractions fairly successfully, in spite of their relatives' misunderstandings and antigay preaching. But others have messed up badly. They've been turned away from their sincerely held faith from Sunday School days and some, now with no hope in this life, have killed themselves, whether by an unintentional drug overdose or, on purpose, with a gun or a leap into the path of an onrushing subway train.

Carl Trueman, an Orthodox Presbyterian minister and church history professor at Westminster Seminary, is another evangelical who did *not* sign The Nashville Statement. Though he doesn't condone same-sex relationship, he says that The Statement "deals with symptoms, not causes, and only with the symptoms that play best within the increasingly fragile coalition of conservative evangelical Christianity." Referring to The Nashville Statement as but one more of many "grandiose national statements", he asks rhetorically: "Who gives them the right to test-case for orthodoxy?" He's long pointed out that, for Christianity, "Sexual morality is not the only, or even the central thing". Says Trueman, quite frankly: "I have to confess to being as confused as many in the Gay movement over the evangelical histrionics surrounding the issue of the Bible's teaching on homosexuality: If all manner of blasphemy is acceptable in the church, why make homosexuality *the* issue to fight over? ... The unique status evangelicals seem to have decided to accord to homosexuality makes it look to the wider world as if their motives are not those of consistent care for Christian orthodoxy but homophobia, pure and simple."

Indeed, one of The Nashville Statement's signers, a real stickler for Reformed theology, put up with the repeated denials of even Christ's resurrection at the very highest levels within his mainline denomination. And he did this for many years. It was only when his denomination came out with its strongest *pro-gay* position that he finally called it quits.

Todd Pruitt of the Alliance of Confessing Evangelicals is another of the several pastors in the Presbyterian Church in America (PCA) who did *not* sign The Nashville Statement, even though he disapproves of gay relationship. But, he explains *his* refusal to sign by asking rhetorically: “Why would I sign a document produced by an organization [the CBMW] which has embraced Trinitarian error (the eternal subordination of the Son)?”

PCA pastor **Scott Sauls** also *refused* to sign. Now pastoring a church in the Nashville area, he’d been on Tim Keller’s Redeemer PCA staff in New York City. Sauls says The Statement “can only alienate” gay Christians. That’s an understatement. Sauls learned this lesson from hearing of the hurt and anger felt by gays who’d been attending Keller’s Redeemer Church, until Keller signed the antigay “Manhattan Declaration” in 2009.

Rod Dreher admits that he was “not prepared for the vehement pushback” by so many conservative evangelicals *against* The Nashville Statement. Yet, he’s written plenty on how much he thinks Western culture has drifted from its spiritual moorings. He now, no doubt, has even more “evidence” of this. A prolific and popular writer at *The American Conservative*, Dreher grew up with a painful sense of not belonging, of not fitting in, even in his own family. Reared in the small town Deep South as a Methodist, he became a Leftist at LSU, later became a conservative Roman Catholic – until the gay sex scandal among the priests – and now he’s Eastern Orthodox and advocates for a kind of cloistered retreat from the secular pressures of modern society.

He often writes *against* homosexuality and “the gay agenda”, even though he still recalls the real pain *he* felt when, at 14, his dad angrily called him a “sissy”. Given his sense of isolation, his loneliness, as he grew up in a simple, rural Southern family that not only didn’t *understand* him and what were, to them, his *odd*, bookworm ways, but openly *rejected* him for his seeming, to them, so, unacceptably “different”, it’s sad that he can’t feel more affinity with LGBT folks who, for *generations*, have experienced “not fitting in”, not even in *their own skins*, let alone in their Southern families and their rural home towns, in their schools and in their churches where they heard homosexuality denounced as from the devil.

Dreher reports that, at a luncheon with some *evangelicals*, he was *shocked* to hear them voice their *strong objections* to The Nashville Statement’s “plucking the speck out of LGBT eyes while ignoring the log in the church’s own eye”, “telling Christians who affirm LGBT that they have left Christian orthodoxy”, and turning off younger Christians by focusing on still “more culture-war red meat”. Dreher was not at all receptive to these evangelicals’ criticisms. He dismisses all of their deeply insightful and caring concerns by sneering: “This is what happens when you theologize guided by nothing but emotion.”

Well, *all emotions are prompted by thoughts*. So, *what thoughts* did these evangelicals have in *mind* – in the very *minds* with which Jesus called us to *love God*? Clearly, they were thoughts derived *explicitly* from Jesus’ rebuke to hypocrites and Jesus’ summation of the Law. (Matt 7:3ff; Mk 12:30f) The consequent *emotion* that’s then generated by such thoughts is the *informed love* that anti-homosexual legalists so readily disparage as “nothing but emotion”. But such *informed love* is what prompts us to *live* Jesus’ Golden Rule.

Jonathan Merritt of the Religious News Service is a *celibate* gay Christian and a Southern Baptist Convention president’s *son* – another of those many gay relatives of evangelical leaders. Of The Nashville Statement, the younger Merritt tweeted: “I would not have signed this for many reasons, but my dad did. I love, respect, and look up to him. I also disagree with him.” He decried The Statement’s lack of awareness of the church’s even quite recent past sins against gay people and he comments: “Christian theology generally asserts that repentance is the key that unlocks the door of conversion. The Nashville Statement attempts to convert the culture while refusing to repent of its own failures on these very issues.”

Merritt kindly counsels that, “Progressives who hope for change should take a deep breath, and stay the course. Keep comforting your friends. Keep making space for those whom others refuse to welcome. Keep loving your neighbors, and don’t forget that these signers are your neighbors, too.”

Turning to antigay conservatives who say that even “non-practicing” homosexually oriented Christians are *not* the people they should be, Merritt’s message paraphrases Jesus: “Those who live by marginalization tactics will die by them also.” He clearly recognizes that, “Conservative Christians are quickly becoming the minority on these matters. For better or worse, *they* will soon be the ones who are considered

unfaithful and sinful.” Indeed, this is already coming to pass in the vigorously biblical rejection of The Nashville Statement by so many evangelicals.

Justin Lee, the evangelical gay young man who, in 2001, faithfully founded the Gay Christian Network for evangelical support of same-sex Christian couples (Side A) as well as for same-sex celibate Christians (Side B), has written of his early struggles and his full acceptance of his homosexuality in his book, *Torn: Rescuing the Gospel from the Gays vs. Christians Debate*. His book is described by *Christianity Today* as “disarmingly vulnerable [and] poignant”.

Lee points out accurately that, Denny Burk’s extremist effort in helming The Nashville Statement *is not and should not be confused* with a “mainstream voice of traditional Christianity.” Lee wisely warns: “If those of us on Side A agree to draw the battle lines in such a way that [Burk] is the *de facto* representative of all Side B thought, we’re doing terrible, terrible damage to the cause.”

Ron Belgau, a *celibate* gay Christian who’s worked for years with Justin Lee in their joint ministry of support for same-sex Christian couples who, in not violating conscience, are open to a loving, faithful, same-sex marriage (Side A) or, in abiding by conscience, are living as celibate Christians who believe that, for them, to act on their same-sex attraction would be wrong (Side B). Lee and Belgau have always supported folks living within the bounds of *conscience* for, obviously, to violate one’s conscience is neither spiritually right nor psychologically wise.

Belgau well describes The Nashville Statement as “pretty clearly a self-righteous clique, whose members don’t call each other out, but instead focus on blaming all their problems on those outside the clique, whether other Christians who fall short by the clique’s standards, or non-Christians”. He illustrates his insightful criticism by quoting and rejecting The Nashville Statement’s preamble. It piously asks: “Will the church of the Lord Jesus Christ lose her biblical conviction, clarity, and courage, and blend into the spirit of the age? Or will she hold fast to the word of life, draw courage from Jesus, and unashamedly proclaim his way as the way of life? Will she maintain her clear, counter-cultural witness to a world that seems bent on ruin?”

Fundamentalists repeatedly *condemned* those they accused of blending “into the spirit of the age” in supporting *racial integration* and *interracial marriage*. Some of the culprits in those racist “crusades”, with *their* self-righteous sermons and proclamations, were parents, grandparents and other relatives of *today’s* older Southern signers of The Nashville Statement, not to mention that some of these signers, in their own youth, held to those old racist ideas and racist systems – and in the *name* of “the Lord Jesus Christ”.

According to CBMW’s Burk: “It was our aim to say nothing new, but to bear witness to something very ancient.” No *Semper Reformanda* for us! Well, at least, not by *intent!*

But, actually, Burk’s entire enterprise in The Nashville Statement is focused on an issue that’s *not at all*, in his self-serving expression, “something very ancient”. What *would* be, indeed, “something very ancient”, in the *sexual* world of the Bible, would be, e.g., child brides, polygamous marriage, arranged marriages, marriages of consanguinity, levirate marriage, etc.

However, Burk’s *is* the *very ancient* – at least the *very old* – rationalization of previous *Southern Baptists*, as well as *their* longing-to-be “more-racist-than-thou” religious *rivals*, the *Independent Separatist Fundamentalist Bible* Baptists. They all resorted to the very same self-serving, culture-bound, nostalgic rhetoric to rationalize *their* “biblical” condemnation of *interracial* marriage, not to mention their very same efforts against all racial *integration* – whether at church, in schools, at water fountains, theaters, diners, or in housing, etc.

Moreover, the CBMW does *not* condone *all heterosexual* marriages between Christians. The CBMW condones *only non-egalitarian* marriage for Christians, i.e., so-called “complementarity” in heterosexual Christian marriage arrangements. Their claim is that every wife must be *submissive* to her husband because *he* is the *God-appointed head* over *her*. The CBMW is against *egalitarian* marriage, i.e., where the couple is *mutually* submissive. No wonder they’re confused about *same-sex* marriage. The CBMW *can’t* condone a same-sex marriage because there are *two* “heads” in a male couple and *no* “head” in a female couple. How in this world is a double-headed or a headless couple to be governed? By the CBMW, of course! And CBMW’s *governing* principle is: *No same-sex couples!* Problem solved.

Jason Allen, an SBC seminary president and a signatory of The Nashville Statement, naturally endorses the CBMW's husband's role as head *over* his submissive wife. But he goes so far as to boast of this "sacred" plan as, "sanctified testosterone" and "Christian masculinity". It's a wonder that such "macho men" can be at all comfortable with the *biblical* picture of *their* being "the *bride* of Christ", even as Isaiah pictured the Lord their Maker as the ancient Hebrews' *husband*. (Cf. e.g., Isa 54:5; II Cor 11:2f)

But Luther, who brought us all back to the Bible 500 years ago this year, said: "The purpose of the whole Bible is to show us the goodness of God in Christ." And, he added explicitly, it's *not* to tell us "how a family is to be governed". Luther, with affection, a smile and a wink, used to tease to his just-as-quick-witted wife as, "My *lord*, Kate". He'd not have been welcome in the CBMW.

David French, an editor at *National Review*, is also a signatory of The Nashville Statement. He badly overreaches to concoct *the following unbiblical* notion: "This [i.e., The Nashville Statement] is basic Christianity". *Basic Christianity*? How so? How can *this*, The Nashville Statement, be "basic Christianity" with its near *idolatry of the heterosexual pair*? The Nashville Statement smashes to smithereens Paul's key teaching about the lack of any *Christian relevance* to the "male and female" pair when the apostle cites the *literal* "male and female" from the ancient Greek translation of Genesis 1:27: "God created *humanity* in His own image, *male and female*, created he *them*." As Christ's apostle, Paul dismisses *any relevance, in Christ*, to the "male and female" pair, *per se*. In his Galatian letter, with reference to those who are now "in Christ", Paul shifts from his phrasings of long-held opposites, "*neither slave nor free*", "*neither Jew nor Greek*" to his quite deliberate, "*no male and female*". In making his adjustment to his construction in his series on cultural and racial irrelevance in Christ, he explicitly rejects *any* relevance of the *heterosexual pair* so far as *identity in Christ* is concerned. "*In Christ, there is now*", says Paul, "*no 'male and female'.*" (Gal 3:28) Period.

The highly respected evangelical biblical scholar, **F. F. Bruce**, clearly noted that Paul was affirming *here*, by his citing, literally, from the ancient Greek translation of Genesis 1:27, that "*in Christ, there's now, no 'male and female'.*" Paul did not keep his former construction and say, there's now, "*neither male nor female*". He said, there's now, "*no male and female*". Yet, today, antigay preachers abuse the cited Old Testament text of Genesis 1:27 as, perhaps, their *favorite* go-to "proof text" against *same-sex couples*. On Galatians 3:28, Bruce went on to stress the fact that, "Paul states the basic principle here; if restrictions on it are found elsewhere, they are to be understood in relation to Galatians 3:28, and not vice versa." Period.

In the letter to Ephesians, the list is repeated and even expanded so that what belongs to the "*old, natural order*" of *distinctions* and *cultural oppositions*, is totally thrown out. The underscored, basic truth, is that, in all Christians, "Christ is all, and is in all." And this fact leads to the call: "Therefore, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in mature unity." (Eph 3:11 ff)

Well, it was, indeed, about *basic Christianity* that C. S. Lewis devoted his classic, *Mere Christianity*. In reply to the BBC's invitation to do a radio series, he proposed talks on what he called, "the law of nature". The series, entitled, "Right and Wrong: A Clue to the Meaning of the Universe", became what we now know as his popular work on truly *basic* Christianity, *Mere Christianity*. This backstory regarding Lewis' take on "the law of nature" is relevant today, and not only because of today's antigay notion that same-sex marriage is "*against nature*".

Lewis explained right up front, in his Preface to *Mere Christianity*, that he was focusing on *the basics*, i.e., "the belief that has been common to nearly all Christians at all times, agreed or common, or 'mere' Christianity". A major evangelical church historian, **George Marsden**, takes note, in his book, *C. S. Lewis's Mere Christianity: A Biography*, that Lewis "encouraged readers to affirm the particularities of a specific subtradition but to be generous to those who chose differently." Lewis' generosity reflects the biblical call to patient love that seeks unity in the *basics*, but resists a "know-it-all" bullying that leaves no room for any *ever-reforming* insight as Christians meet with challenges of which earlier generations knew nothing. In contrast, The Nashville Statement insists that there can be absolutely *no agreeing to disagree* on anything that its authors dictate.

Concerning matters of sexuality, Lewis himself, of course, was not unaware of those he tirelessly criticized elsewhere as, “omnipotent moral busybodies” fixated on *others’ sex* lives. So, he endeavored to make, very, very clear, this following point of his, *Mere Christianity*. With reference to *sex*, he asserted: “I want to make it as clear as I possibly can that the centre of Christian morality is not here [i.e., in *sex*]. If anyone thinks that Christians regard unchastity as the supreme vice, he is quite wrong. The sins of the flesh are bad, but they are the least bad of all sins. All the worst pleasures are purely spiritual: the pleasure of putting other people in the wrong.” Lewis mused rhetorically: “What Christian, in a society as worldly and cruel [as ours is] would pick out the carnal sins for special reprobation? Cruelty is surely more evil than lust, and the World at least as dangerous as the Flesh.”

Whether Christian or not, marriages of *same-sex* couples as well as *heterosexual* couples – *any and all good* marriages – seek for the very closest of all human intimacy and loving companionship and dedication to the shared welfare of each other. Same-sex or heterosexual, the *basic human* quest for such *kinship* with a life partner, pursues the meeting of the very *same* needs. In the Bible, though this is often not understood from the common English translation, the Hebrew term regularly rendered, “one flesh”, literally, and simply, means *kinship*. *We’re now family!* How different that is from the typical misconception that’s based in a naïve reading of the English rendering of “one flesh” that, supposedly, points to purposes of *breeding* and sexual *reproduction*.

So, do the signers of The Nashville Statement treat the marriages of *others*, as they want *their own* marriages to be treated – as Jesus called us all to do? *That* is surely a matter of “*basic Christianity*”, is it not? Said Jesus: “In *everything*, treat *others* as *you* want to be treated, for this sums up all of the Law and all of the Prophets.” (Matt 7:12) Surely, “*everything*” includes *something as significant* as a couple’s marriage. Do The Nashville Statement signers want *others* to mess with and mess up the marriages of the *signers*? Of course not! But isn’t *that*, in effect, as well as, really, by *intent*, what The Nashville Statement’s signers *are doing* and, really, *aim* to do – for *Jesus’* sake, of course. But Paul repeats *Jesus’* summary of the Law and Prophets when he tells the Christians in Galatia: “The *entire* law is fulfilled in keeping this *one* command: ‘Love your neighbor *as yourself*’.” (Gal 5:14) The *entire* law! So, Paul, following Jesus, already did *sum up* “*basic Christianity*” – at least with reference to how we’re to relate to one another, whether a relative, friend, enemy, or a couple that happens to be same-sex.

Virtually all of the signatories to The Nashville Statement are *married*. Evidently, they *want* to be married. They *want* to meet *their most basic human needs for the most intimate of all human companionship, with a cherished mate of their mutual choice*. There’s nothing strange about that, at least nowadays – though, in Bible days, the choice wasn’t always *mutual*.

Yet, The Nashville signers seem to think that there’s something *terribly strange* about *same-sex attracted* persons having these very *same* needs for such close *kinship*. And The Nashville signers seem to think that there’s something *terribly strange* in expecting that they should be able to understand these needs of their same-sex attracted neighbors. The signers so easily fail to so easily extrapolate, from what *they* really know quite well as *their own experienced* needs for a faithful sexual companionship and *their own meeting* of these deeply human needs, to grasp the very simple fact that *same-sex oriented* persons, including, yes, many *evangelicals*, wish to meet *these very same sexual needs* with a mate of *their mutual choice*. These *basic needs* are indisputably the *same*. And these needs can be met by the heterosexually oriented only with a person of the *other* sex, just as these needs can be met by the homosexually oriented only with a person of the *same* sex. Yet the signers of The Nashville Statement can’t, or won’t, see this. They can’t or won’t look into themselves, into *their own deepest* selves, to see *their neighbors there*. Thus, they fail Jesus’ call to do so.

Paul summed up *the Good News of the gospel* as being *basic Christianity*: “The righteousness of God is *revealed* – a righteousness that is *by faith* from first to last, from beginning to end, as *it is written*: The righteous will *live by faith*”. (Rom 1:17)

Paul was citing Habakkuk, the prophet: “Look, the *puffed up* soul is *not* upright; but the righteous will *live by faith*.” (Hab 2:4) Again, Paul put the summary of the Christian gospel succinctly: “I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who *trusts*, first to the Jews and then to the Gentiles.” (Rom 1:16) *That* good news back *then* – salvation for the “unclean”, the “dogs”, without their getting circumcised and going kosher – was as fiercely resisted by the “traditional”

religionists of Paul's day as the good news is resisted by "traditional" religionists of our day when they insist that there's no salvation for so-called "Sodomites" unless they get out of "Sodom".

Over against obsessing over *anti-homosexuality's* being about "basic Christianity", the Bible's most familiar verse sums up "basic Christianity": "God so loved *the world* that he gave his only Son, that *whoever trusts in him* shall not perish but have eternal life." (John 3:16) Where, in such amazingly good news of God's free grace in Christ is there any legalistic, fine print disclaimer or any exception clause about *anything*, least of all, about a 21st-century understanding of homosexual orientation and a 21st-century understanding of egalitarian *same*-sex marriage? Yet, such is irresponsibly foisted, anachronistically, into the ancient world as if we could rummage around in the Bible and read all about *it*.

These *heterosexual* signatories are *obsessed* over what their misinformed, meandering minds, may imagine about what goes on within the lovingly committed same-sex marriages of their neighbors, for which the signatories presumably have no personal *desires* and are not *jealous*, though they may indeed, as Lewis figured, have "a certain nausea [that, he noted with some wit, was] of very little relevance to moral judgment",

Nonetheless, the rabid opponents of same-sex marriage certainly do face the *terrible* temptation that Lewis called, that *worst* of sinful pleasures: the "pleasure of putting other people in the wrong". The "pleasure of putting other people in the wrong" is, of course, so very tempting for *everyone*, for *everyone* feels guilty and distracted by his or her own guilt for "falling short" and fancies the "need" for a *scapegoat*. What more "useful" scapegoat could there be than one whose sexual temptations are not one's own sexual temptations? The more one rants against what doesn't tempt *him*, the more he can try to distract himself from the guilt of temptations he *does* experience and may even yield to. At least, he can *try* to believe that his own temptations are "natural". By contrast to one's own temptations, another's temptations are so delightfully and deliciously "*disgusting!*"

But Christians don't need a scapegoat in *homosexuals*. Our Scapegoat is Jesus on the cross!

In 1955, Lewis asked, rhetorically, "Is [the hostility to homosexuality] on Christian grounds?" Answering his own question in those days before the Religious Right's uprising against homosexuals, he asked rhetorically: "But how many of those who fulminate on the matter are in fact Christians?" No, he concluded: "The real reason for all the pother is, in my opinion, neither Christian nor ethical. We attack this vice not because it is the worst but because it is, by adult standards, the most disreputable and unmentionable, and happens also to be a crime."

In 1960, two years before he died, Lewis wrote a letter of encouragement to the homosexual painter of landscapes and Beatrix Potter's portraits, **Delmar Banner**. Lewis told him: "I quite agree with you about Homosexuals." And Lewis assured him that he, too, was "fighting for the persecuted Homosexual against snoopers and busybodies" and was endorsing the efforts to reform the anti-homosexual laws in Britain. Four years after Lewis' death, Britain finally decriminalized homosexuality, in 1967.

Back in 1914, Lewis, in his hometown of Belfast, was 16 years old. He'd later write that, a 19-year-old nearby neighbor, **Arthur Greeves**, "had tried, quite unsuccessfully, to make friends with my brother and myself." One day, "I received a message saying that Arthur was in bed, convalescent, and would welcome a visit. I can't remember what led me to accept this invitation, but for some reason I did. I found Arthur sitting up in bed. On the table beside him lay a copy of *Myths of the Norsemen*."

Immediately, both young men were engaged in animated conversation over their delight in their mutual excitement with Norsemen. In his book, *Surprised By Joy*, Lewis recalls: "Next moment the book was in our hands, our heads were bent close together, we were pointing, quoting, talking – soon almost shouting – discovering in a torrent of questions that we liked not only the same things, but the same parts of it and in the same way: that both knew the stab of Joy and that, for both, the arrow was shot from the North."

Says Lewis: "Many thousands of people have had the experience of finding the first friend, and it is none the less a wonder; as great a wonder (*pace* the novelists) as first love, or even a greater."

In 1918, Arthur revealed himself to Lewis to be a homosexual. Lewis' immediate response: "Congratulations old man, I am delighted that you have had the moral courage to form your own opinions independently, in defiance of the old taboos." He agreed with Arthur that homosexuality "is a sort of mystery only to be fully understood by those who are made that way – and", he admitted humbly, "my views on it can be at best but emotion." Arthur was a devout Christian. At the time, Lewis wasn't. However, there's

no record in any of his half-century of correspondence with, “My dear Arthur”, that he *ever* retracted his 1918 response after he, himself, became a Christian. They exchanged more letters than Lewis exchanged with anyone else.

In 1931, when Lewis shared with his “dear Arthur” that he, himself, had now become a committed Christian, Lewis was told that Arthur wept tears of joy. In 1933, Lewis dedicated his first Christian book, *The Pilgrim’s Regress*, to Arthur.

In 1954, in response to a professor-friend’s asking about his American college’s Christian students’ coming to him with questions about homosexuality, Lewis summed up, wisely and pastorally: “All I have ever said is that, like all other tribulations, it must be offered to God and His guidance how to use it must be sought.”

Unlike signers of The Nashville Statement, Lewis did not pronounce a cheap shot from a high horse in lordly judgment about the daily personal challenges faced by same-sex oriented Christians. He left that up to each Christian’s prayerful guidance from the Lord, Himself, a far better Guide than authors of declarations on what they do not understand.

Lewis intuited that such Christians would have rough times enough, not only with their fellow Christians who didn’t understand them but, with their own consciences that must not be violated and that needed to be well prepared for the challenges, and with their own deep needs for intimacy, whether met or not, and he knew that to thrive at all in all of this, it truly would take the good Lord’s guidance.

In the last letter Lewis ever wrote to “My dear Arthur”, on September 11, 1963, he reported his having come out of a coma and having retired from Cambridge as an invalid. He said he’d been “completely deserted” by his older brother, Warnie, who was now off on another long drinking binge in Ireland, refusing to return. He wonders about what more pain may still await him before he finally does make it *through* “the Gate” next time. Still, he said he was “quite comfortable and cheerful. The only real snag is that it looks as if you and I shall never meet again in this life. This often saddens me very much.” And, then, in the very last line of this last letter to Arthur, Lewis lamented lovingly, “Oh Arthur, never to see you again!”

What a contrast to the spirit of The Nashville Statement!

When summing up “basic Christianity” or “mere Christianity” or “plain Christianity” in this, the 500th autumn since Luther’s recovery of *biblical* Christianity, we should all recall that, for Luther, it was all about *faith* in God’s *word* and *reliance* on God’s *grace* in Jesus Christ *alone*, with *no requirements of any added “good” works*. In fact, to add *any* such “good” works or accomplishments of one’s own, Luther said so forcefully, would only be “adding sins to sins”. Salvation was *all* about God’s grace in the *faithfully finished work* of Christ – and even the believer’s *faith*, said Luther, was God’s *gift*, indeed, that *faith* itself, was God’s *work*.

Yet, prior to Luther and ever since Luther, *so many and such varied add-ons* of “works righteousness” have come and gone, to be replaced by later do’s and don’ts, in the wake of misread and misused Bible verses in shifting social scenarios.

The subject matter has so often been about *sex* and *marriage*. Later, apologies are made to the dead for their having been abused, even unto death, by our forebears – *not by us*, it’s always quickly added. And then we move on in self-satisfied acquittal as though our own descendants won’t have to apologize for *our* misreading and misusing the Bible, and thereby, *our misreading of others* and *our misuse of them*.

It should not be forgotten that the *religious imperium* in Luther’s day cruelly judged and condemned *his* “abnormal”, “irregular”, “unapproved”, but *affectionate*, marriage to a former nun, his dear “Lord Kate”, as “whoredom”.